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CH'AN

# NEWSLETTER

No. 13 May 1981

## CH'AN MEDITATION CENTER OPENING CEREMONY

Sunday, May 10, 1981, was a memorable date for the history of the Ch'an Meditation Center, for on this auspicious day we celebrated three joyous events: the birthday of Sakyamuni Buddha, the official opening of the Ch'an Center, and the leaving home ceremony of one Ch'an Center member. The event, attended by well over one hundred people and receiving newspaper and television coverage, was the result of the careful planning and hard work of everyone at the Center during the few weeks preceding the day.

The day's activities started at ten A.M. with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, marking the official opening of the Ch'an Meditation Center. Following this, Shih-fu (Master) Cheng-Yen conducted the ceremony for enshrining the statues of Sakyamuni Buddha, Manjusri Bodhisattva and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva which have arrived from Taiwan. The beginning of the ceremony consisted of lifting the veils covering the statues. Those who participated were Mr. Lex Hixon, host of WBAI radio program "In the Spirit", Upasika Hsiao-fu (Mrs. Chen), who came from Taiwan just to attend this opening ceremony, and Upasika Mrs. Yu, who is a disciple of Shih-fu's own late Master. Shih-fu remarked:

"At the Ch'an Center the main emphasis is on the spirit. But just as artists need paint and musicians need instruments, so practitioners need physical tools which represent the spirit of the Buddha, such as statues and scriptures, to support their practice. Before they are enshrined, the statues are mere objects. But after the enshrinement we will consider them as living tools to help us in our practice. During the ceremony, we use three objects: first, the towel to purify the image, second, the brush, symbolizing wisdom, to open the Buddha's eyes. After the eyes are opened the mirror is employed to bestow blessings on the statues so that, possessing the merit and wisdom of all Buddhas, they are able to receive the respect of all sentient beings."

Following the enshrinement ceremony, we celebrated the Buddha's birthday. While slowly chanting Sakyamuni Buddha's name, everyone present took turns in sprinkling fragrant water over a statue of the baby Buddha. Shih-fu remarked:

"When Sakyamuni Buddha was born, about 2500 years ago, beautiful flowers blossomed and scented rain fell out of season. It is said that the nagas (serpents) sent down the rain and the heavenly beings spread the flowers to celebrate the birth of the Buddha. We, in celebrating the Buddha's birthday, are also celebrating our coming into contact with Buddha Dharma. The water represents the purity of our mind. We should participate in this ceremony with the idea of progressing towards the goal of cleansing our minds."

After the ceremony of Midday Offering, Shih-fu said these words:

"Although we offer food to the Buddhas, they never touch those offerings. It is we who consume the food. So what is the purpose of making offerings? As for the flower arrangement, the beautiful side is actually facing the people in the temple and not the statues. After all, are we making offerings to the Buddhas or to ourselves? The Buddha statues are gilded and very colorful. But are the adornments of the Buddhas for themselves or for sentient beings? Naturally, the answer is for sentient beings, not for themselves. Actually we beautify the temple in order to enhance our own wisdom and the offerings we make expresses our merit.

Next, Shih-fu invited our good friend and honored guest Lex Hixon to say a few words. Lex expressed the feeling of everyone present that the beauty and power of the Center, the images, and the people here are all coming through the karmic channel of Shih-fu. For this we offer bows of gratitude knowing that he will make a tremendous impact on our culture and our world. Shih-fu is standing in the condition which is beyond conditions, and calling us to join him in that ultimate place.

Shih-fu then expressed his gratitude for Lex's blessings and gave his blessings to Lex, especially for the work he is doing in furthering the spiritual pursuit of people in this country.

At noon, a beautiful vegetarian lunch was served in the center's newly renovated basement. After lunch there was a recess period during which visitors were invited to observe a special exhibition of Buddhist scriptures and ritual implements set up just for this occasion.

At two P.M. there was held a ceremony of leaving home and transmission of the ten sramanerika precepts to Karen Swaine, who formally became a Buddhist nun, taking the Dharma name Kuo-Hsien. She is the second of Shih-fu's American disciples to leave home, the first being Bhiksu Kuo-Jen, who became a monk in 1978. The ceremony was conducted by three eminent Dharma Masters: Master Sheng-Yen as the Precepts Master, Master Fa-Yün (abbot of Grace Gratitude Temple in Chinatown) as the Teaching Master (or acarya), and Master Wei-Ting (an elder Bhiksuni who first left home in 1941 and recently arrived here from Hong Kong) who represented Shih-fu as the head-shaving Master. Both Fa-Yün and Wei-Ting are Dharma Masters of very high standing, and were both disciples of Venerable Ch'an Master Hsü-Yün in mainland China.

Also present at the ceremony were members of Karen's family - her mother, brother, uncle and aunt. As she was taking leave of her family, Shih-fu remarked that originally the child belongs to her family, but after leaving home she dedicates her life for the good of all sentient beings. In this process unlimited merit is accomplished. Therefore Shih-fu congratulated her parents for the great merit they have achieved in bringing Karen up and in allowing her to leave home to follow the Buddha.

Everyone present found the day's events, with alternating moments of seriousness and relaxation, a moving and joyful experience.

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#### OTHER NEWS ITEMS

There are two more intensive 7-day meditation retreats scheduled for this summer before Shih-fu leaves for Taiwan at the end of July. The dates are June 26 to July 3, and July 17 to 24. Please register early.

Weekend retreats are held the second weekend of every month from Fri. eve thru Sunday eve. The dates for the next two months are June 12-14 and July 10-12.

Shih-fu continues to teach the 4-session Beginners Class in Meditation on Saturday mornings from 9:00 to 11:30. The next class will begin on June 27th. Those who would like a more informal introduction to meditation practice are welcome to come on Tuesday evenings at 8:00 for a free introductory lesson taught by Shih-fu's teaching assistants.

On Wednesday evenings Shih-fu is continuing to teach a class to train assistants (open to those who have participated in two retreats), which was begun last winter. Whereas the first class emphasized teaching methodology, the present class concentrates on inner spiritual development.

During the past month, Shih-fu has given lectures on Ch'an theory and practice at four universities: at Columbia University on April 24, at Rutgers University on April 28, at Manhattan College on April 30, and at Hunter College on May 5. At all places, the majority of students expressed an interest in Ch'an and the practice of meditation.

On two consecutive Sundays, April 26 and May 3, Shih-fu was interviewed on WBAI radio program "In the Spirit" produced by Lex Hixon.

On Sunday April 5th, Dale Todaro (who teaches Buddhism at Manhattan College) visited the Ch'an Center to lecture on his experiences as the only American to complete the course of practice in the Shingon (esoteric) tradition of Buddhism on Mt. Koyasan in Japan.

In the week preceding the opening ceremony of the Ch'an Meditation Center, we were visited by various Dharma Masters and lay Buddhists. Among those who visited were Dharma Master Ta-Fang Shou-Yüeh and Dharma Master Jih-Ch'ang of Kwang Ming Temple, Mrs. James Yin of Mahayana Temple and her older sister, Dharma Master Ao-Ling of Eastern Dhyana Temple, Dharma Master Hsi-Ch'en of Wonderful Enlightenment Temple, Dharma Master Fa-Yün of Grace Gratitude Temple, and Dharma Master Bhiksuni Fo-Hsing of Yüan-T'ung Temple.

Sunday is an "open house" for all visitors. The schedule of Sunday activities are as follows:

AM 9:00 Chanting Sutras  
11:30 Midday Offering  
PM 12:00 Vegetarian Lunch  
1:00 Dharma Lecture by Master Sheng-Yen  
2:30 Meditation Activities, including sitting, interviews, yoga exercise, slow and fast walking, Dharma talk, and work.  
5:30 Evening Service

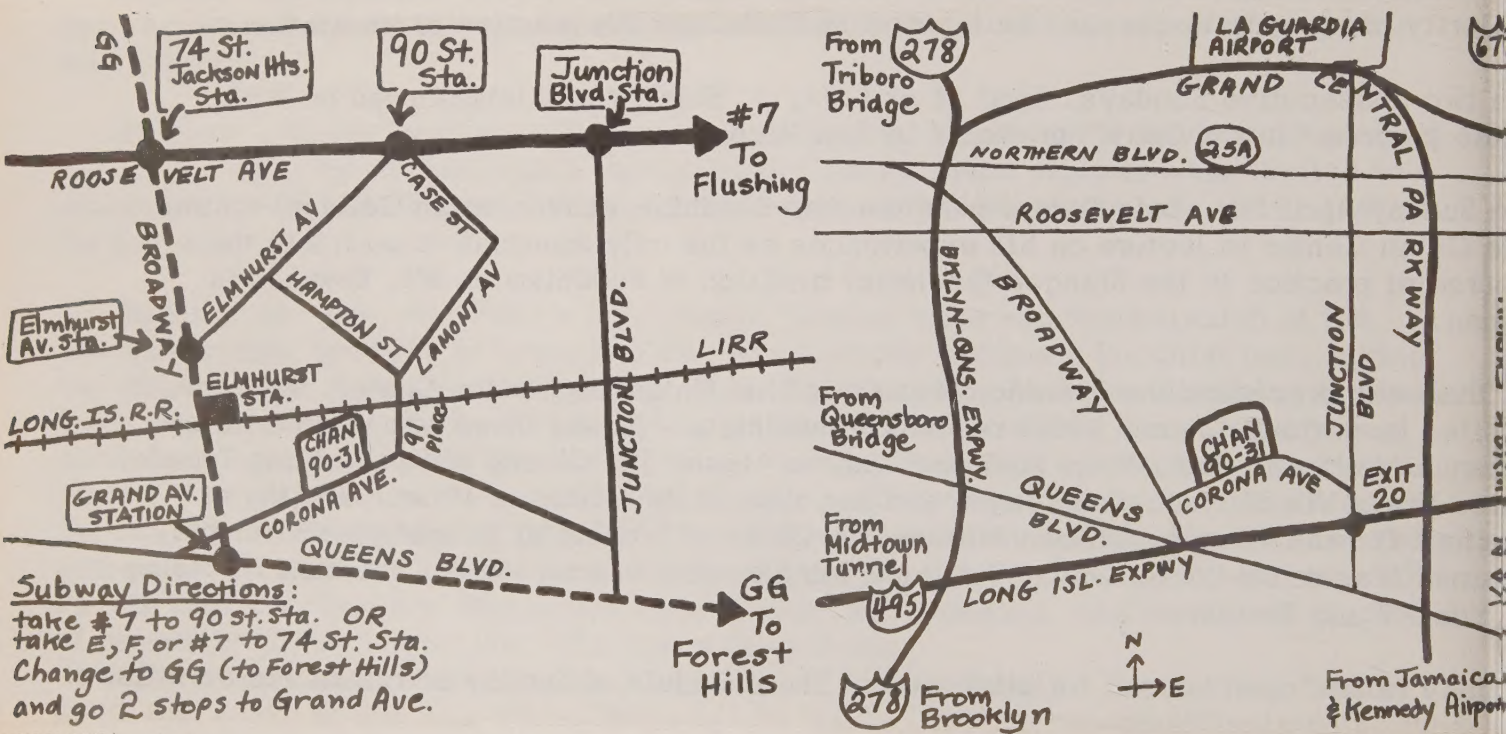
A Tai Chi class has been scheduled for Thursday nights, 7:30 - 9:00 P.M.

A Yoga class is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday evenings. For further information, call (212) 592-6593, or write:

Ch'an Meditation Center  
Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture  
90-31 Corona Avenue  
Elmhurst, N.Y. 11373

The maintenance of our center and its activities depend upon contributions from members and friends. If you would like to help support us, any effort will be greatly appreciated. Those interested in offering time and labor may call the center at (212) 592-6593. Anyone who may wish to contribute financially, please make your check payable to the Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture, and mail to the address given below. Your donation is tax-deductible.

Of course, we encourage everyone to visit and participate in our activities.



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